

JOHN & JAMES DOBSON CARPET MILL (WEST PARCEL),  
THE TOWER  
Philadelphia  
Philadelphia County  
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-5383-B

HABS  
PA  
51-PHILA,  
695B-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
Mid-Atlantic Regional Office  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19106

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**HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY**  
**JOHN AND JAMES DOBSON CARPET MILL (West Parcel), THE TOWER**  
**HABS No. PA-5383-B**

Location:

4041-4055 Ridge Avenue  
Philadelphia  
Philadelphia County  
Pennsylvania

Present Owner:

Rouse Urban Housing, Inc.  
1500 Walnut Street, 19th Floor  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19102

Present Occupant:

Vacant.

Significance:

The tower on the Dobson Mill site is significant as the only remnant of what had been one of the largest buildings on the site, the Brussels Carpet Mill (original Building 1). The structure rises above many of the Dobson buildings and serves as a visual landmark in the complex.

## **PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION**

### **A. Physical History**

#### **Date(s) of Erection:**

1872/1873 with alterations in 1885, 1891, 1936 and the early/mid-twentieth century. The tower was erected at the same time that the original Building 1 was constructed. It appears on the 1873 Hexamer Survey of the site.

#### **Architect:**

Unknown.

#### **Original/Subsequent Owners:**

See Chain of Title.

#### **Builder, Contractor, Suppliers:**

Unknown.

#### **Original Plans/Construction:**

The tower was originally constructed as part of Building 1, a six-story monumental mill building that was used for Brussel carpet manufacturing. The tower was seven stories and of stone, with a mansard roof of tin and slate, matching that of the mill building. There were wooden doors at every story and the building was distinguished by its segmental headed double-hung multiple light sash on each floor. The building served as a stairway house and a fire tower to Building 1 and subsequent buildings added to the Brussels Carpet Mill.

#### **Alterations/Additions:**

By 1876 the tower was connected to Building 6 by an exterior bridge (Building 6 has been demolished). In 1885 there was an open wooden bridge extending between the second and third stories of the tower and Building 17. In 1889 another bridge was added at the fourth story of the tower. The mansard roof of the tower was removed and replaced with a flat roof in 1891. A water tank serving a sprinkler fire suppression system was added to the roof at this time. In the early twentieth century, the exterior bridges to the structure were removed and the tower was stuccoed. The tower continued to serve as a stairway house and water tower. Since Building 1 was demolished in 1936 the tower has been freestanding.

## **B. Historical Context**

The Brussels Carpet Mill represented the third phase of building expansion on the Dobson site. Located in the center of the complex, at a considerable distance from Dobson's Creek, a fire suppression system was necessary to have surplus water in close proximity. The tower served this capacity for the carpet mill and the buildings that were added to it. The tower was given the same monumental appearance as the carpet mill building with a mansard roof, an elaborate feature in comparison to the utilitarian appearance of the other buildings on the site.

## **PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION**

### **A. General Statement**

#### **Architectural Character:**

The tower was built of the same rubblestone as the majority of the buildings on the site and was stuccoed sometime during the twentieth century. Because of its height and sizing, the tower has always been a focal point of the complex. The fenestration (infilled c.1950) on the structure is regular with segmental brick arches as in other later buildings on the site.

#### **Condition of Fabric:**

The interior of the structure is severely deteriorated from abandonment and water damage resulting in partial structural failure. The exterior stuccoed elevations are in fair condition.

### **B. Description of Exterior**

#### **Overall Dimensions:**

24.8'x31.6'x 6 stories.

#### **Foundations:**

Rubblestone.

#### **Walls:**

Rubblestone covered in stucco. North, east and west elevations are fenestrated; the majority of the original openings have been infilled. The south elevation was originally a

party wall with Building 1 and has a single window at the fifth story. The elevations are capped with a brick corbeled cornice at the fifth story and an unfenestrated sixth story.

Structural System/Framing:

Masonry with interior timber framing system. The water tank is supported on steel I-beams.

Porches/Stoops/Balconies/Bulkheads:

None.

Chimneys:

None.

Openings:

Doorways/Doors:

North elevation- circa 1950 garage door opening with a steel lintel.

Windows/Shutters:

The north and west elevations have two bays of windows, the east elevation has three bays. The south elevation has one industrial steel sash window at the fifth story. The windows were originally fitted with 12/16 double-hung wood sash with brick segmental arches. Two of these windows survive on the east elevation. The remainder of the openings have been closed with plywood or masonry infill.

Roof:

The roof consists of built up roofing on timber planking. It is in an advanced state of decay. The water tank is wood with steel rope bands and tin roof. The tank is supported on steel I-beams. The parapet is enclosed with a steel pipe railing.

**C. Description of Interior**

Floor Plans:

The interior of the tower consists of rectangular utilitarian space on each floor with a wooden staircase enclosed behind a vertical board partition.

Stairways:

Wooden staircase on each floor enclosed behind a vertical board partition.

Flooring:

Unfinished floor joists and wood floor boards, now severely deteriorated and structurally unsound.

Wall/Ceiling Finishes:

The walls are of rubble covered with plaster. The ceilings are exposed timber and plank and severely deteriorated.

Openings:

Doorways/Doors:

No surviving original or historic interior doors.

Windows:

All windows are recessed in unornamented plaster reveals with wood plank sills.

Decorative Features and Trim:

N/A.

Hardware:

Original hardware, which is no longer extant, is presumed to have been utilitarian in character.

Mechanical Equipment:

Heating, air conditioning, ventilation: N/A.

Lighting: Impossible to determine due to inaccessibility of interior.

Plumbing: Impossible to determine due to inaccessibility of interior.

## **D. Site**

### General Setting/Orientation:

The tower is located in the center of the west parcel of the Dobson Mill complex, directly behind the circa 1940 building that replaced the original Building 1. The tower's six stories make the structure prominent from many locations on the site and the visual focal point of the west parcel.

### Historic Landscape Design:

See Historic Context Section.

### Outbuildings:

N/A.